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I The study of pidgin and creole languages

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1.1 Introduction

This book is concerned with pidgin and creole languages. This statement might well give the impression that we know precisely what is meant by these terms. In fact they are the subject of much debate. Creolists agree neither about the precise definition of the terms **pidgin** and **creole**, nor about the status of a number of languages that have been claimed to be pidgins or creoles. Mixed languages, introduced in chapter 4, have generally not been mentioned at all.

To turn first to **pidgin languages**, it is generally agreed that in essence these represent speech-forms which do not have native speakers, and are therefore primarily used as a means of communication among people who do not share a common language. The degree of development and sophistication attained by such a pidgin depends on the type and intensity of communicative interaction among the its users. Mühlhäusler (1986) makes three basic distinctions amongst speech-forms that creolists have referred to as pidgins – (rather unstable) **jargons**, **stable pidgins**, and **expanded pidgins** (see further chapter 3).

To turn to **creole languages** (or just **creoles**), one vital difference from pidgins is that pidgins do not have native speakers, while creoles do. This is not always an easy distinction to make, as one aspect of the worldwide increase in linguistic conformity, and the concomitant reduction in linguistic diversity, is that extended pidgins are beginning to acquire native speakers. This has happened for instance with Tok Pisin, Nigerian Pidgin English, and Sango (Central African Republic), to name but three cases. In particular this has tended to occur in urban environments, where speakers from different ethnic groups have daily contact with each other. The pidgin then becomes the town language. The children of mixed marriages frequently grow up speaking the home language – the pidgin – as their native language.

1.2 Historical linguistics and the definition of a creole

A creole language can be defined as a language that has come into existence at a point in time that can be established fairly precisely. Non-creole languages are assumed (often in the absence of detailed knowledge of their precise development) to have emerged gradually.

So Archaic Latin developed into Classical Latin, the popular variety of which in turn developed into Vulgar Latin, which among other things developed into Old French, which developed into Middle French, which in turn developed into Modern French. While some stages of this development involved more radical changes in the language than others, we can claim with some justification to be able to trace the line of development from Modern French back to Archaic Latin – the earliest recorded stage of Latin, with on the whole little difficulty. Before that we have to rely on linguistic reconstruction, but once again it is fairly obvious that Latin is a typical Indo-European language, and can thus be safely assumed to have developed from Proto-Indo-European, through the intermediate stages of possibly Proto-Italo-Celtic and certainly Proto-Italic. Proto-Indo-European itself may have been spoken somewhere in Southern Russia (an anachronistic term, of course) around 5000 B.C.

This kind of statement we can definitely not make when talking about creole languages. These exhibit an abrupt break in the course of their historical development. So we cannot say that Sranan (the major English-lexifier creole of Surinam; see chapter 18) derives in any gradual fashion from Early Modern English – its most obvious immediate historical precursor. Even a cursory comparison of Early Modern English with the earliest forms of Sranan (first recorded in 1718) will make it abundantly obvious that we are dealing with two completely different forms of speech. There is no conceivable way that Early Modern English could have developed into the very different Sranan in the available 70 or so years. Even the phonological developments required would be extreme, not to speak of the wholesale changes that would have had to have taken place in the syntax.

So creole languages are different from ordinary languages in that we can say that they came into existence at some point in time. Applying the techniques of historical linguistics to creoles is therefore not simple, and in addition presupposes answering the question of which languages the creole should be compared with: the language which provided the lexicon, or the language(s) which were responsible for most aspects of grammatical structure – inasmuch as it is possible to identify these.

It is clear in fact that creole languages develop as the result of 'linguistic violence' (and, as we shall see, frequently social violence too). In other words, we have to reckon with a break in the natural development of the language, the natural transmission of a language from generation to generation. The parents of the first speakers of Sranan were not English speakers at all, but speakers of various African languages, and what is more important, they did not grow up in an environment where English was the norm. How **creolization**, the development of a creole language, takes place, or at least what the various theories are concerning how it takes place, we cannot really go into at this juncture – this is a controversial matter that will be dealt with in chapters 8 through 11, and briefly below.

What is clear is that creole languages are not in the slightest qualitatively distinguishable

from other spoken languages. Many of them tend to have certain features in common, but creolists are divided as to the interpretation of this fact, and a language like Chinese resembles many creole languages in its grammar. This means that before we can claim a language to be a creole, we need to know something about its history, either linguistic or social, and preferably both. As we know comparatively little about the detailed development of most languages in the world, and virtually nothing of the history of most ethnic groups, this inevitably means that there may be many unrecognized creole languages around the world.

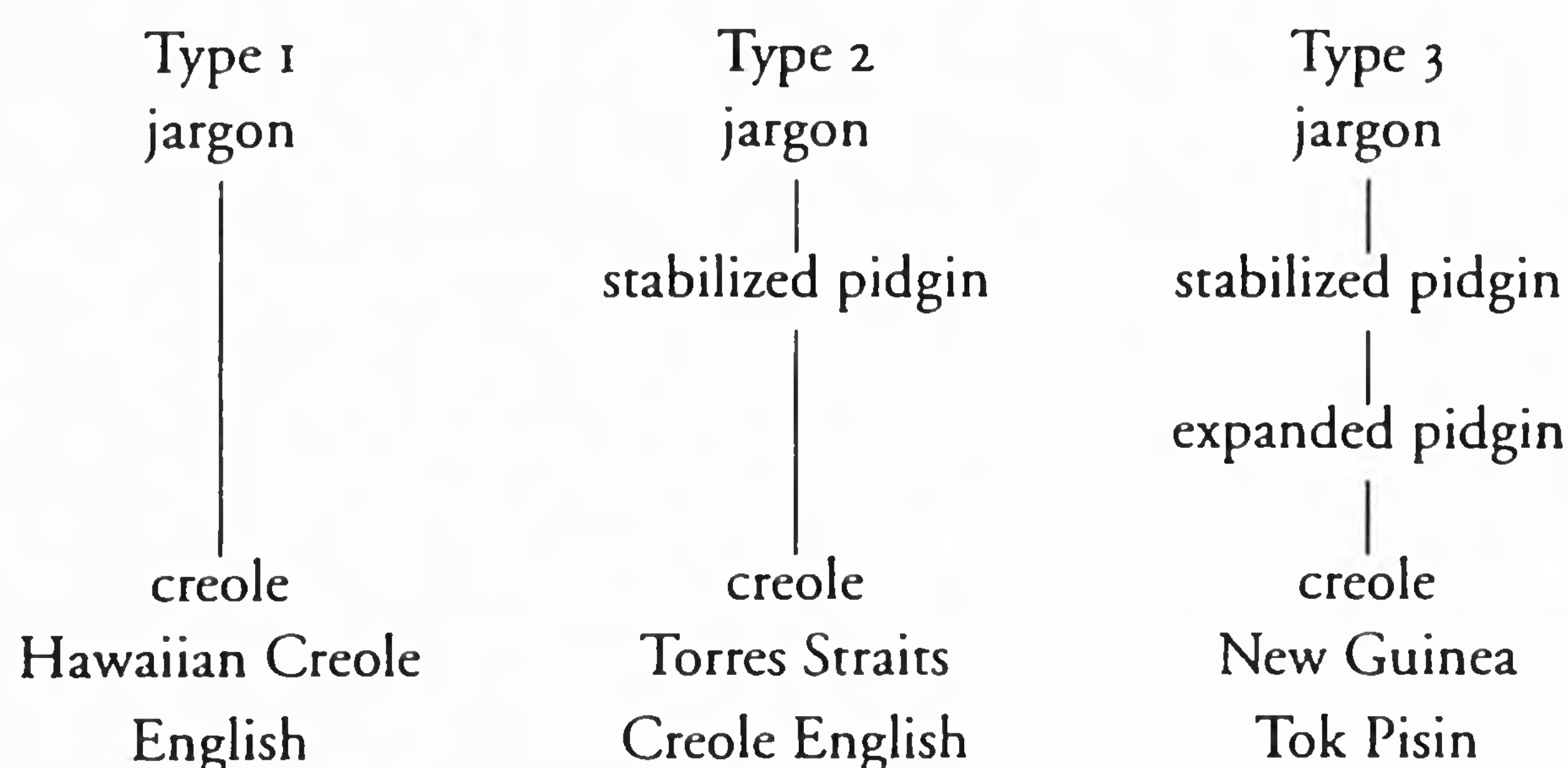
One problem in the identification of particular languages as creoles is caused by the not unusual circumstance that creoles tend to be spoken in the same geographical regions as the languages that provide the greater portion of their lexica (their donor languages, or *lexifier* languages). In some cases we find a continuum of speech-forms varying from the creole at one end of the spectrum (the *basilect*), through intermediate forms (*mesolectal* varieties), to the *lexifier* language (the *acrolect*). Sometimes speech-forms exist which apparently represent cases where either the original mesolect has survived, while the basilectal creole, and sometimes also the original *lexifier* language have not. Such cases may be referred to as *post-creoles*. Other cases seem rather to involve partial creolization, or influence from a creolized form of the same language. These languages may be termed *semi-creoles* or *creoloids*. Afrikaans seems likely to have been the result of some such process. While linguists would not in general wish to recognize this language as being a full creole, many aspects of Afrikaans are reminiscent of the things that happen during creolization. Other cases of putative creoloids are American Black English, and at least some forms of Brazilian Portuguese.

A quite different situation involving an 'intermediate' status is the case of the *mixed languages*. This type which has until now been the object of comparatively little study, involves cases where two languages clearly make a significant contribution to language – frequently one language provides the content words, and another the grammar. Here there is not necessarily any question of simplification. A well-known case of this type to be studied – *Media Lengua* (lit. 'middle language') (Muysken 1981b) – is spoken in Ecuador, and involves Spanish lexical items, combined with basically Quechua syntax, morphology, and phonology. Bakker (1992) has referred to this kind of situation as *language intertwining*. We refer the reader to chapter 4. This whole subject has just started to be studied in any detail. Sometimes a creole involves substantial mixture at all levels of language structure. A case in point is Berbice Dutch Creole, described in chapter 19.

Other cases where languages have become simplified to some extent are of *lingua francas* (not the *Lingua Franca* of the Mediterranean) and *koinés*. These come into existence under similar circumstances – one speech-form becomes widely used by non-native speakers, undergoing a degree of simplification. Here, the process seems to be gradual – in other

words, no linguistic or social violence is involved. We speak of a *lingua franca* when speakers of various different languages are involved, and of a *koine* when the dialects of a single language are involved.

In chapter 26 there is an annotated list of languages where these distinctions and some further ones are used to classify over 500 languages and dialects. To complicate matters speech forms may change in status over time. Various scenarios or *life-cycles* (cf. Hall 1966, who used the term somewhat differently) have been proposed for the development of creoles. Mühlhäusler (1986) presents three such scenarios:



As will be argued in chapter 3, however, not all jargons or pidgins are part of such a life-cycle, and neither can we show that all creoles had a jargon or pidgin stage. It is in this respect that mixed languages display an important difference from creoles. On the one hand, mixed languages did come into existence at a particular moment in time, on the other hand they were formed from ordinary languages with native speakers – there was no jargon or pidgin phase.

1.3 Distribution of pidgins and creoles

The question of the distribution of pidgin and creole languages is one of the growth areas in linguistics. Because of their mixed character these speech varieties have frequently not been accorded the status of language. The frequent prejudice against their recognition as proper linguistic systems has meant that lists of the world's languages, produced up till fairly recently, tended to ignore these speech varieties. While many linguists, and sometimes educationalists, recognize the fact of their existence, this is by no means universally the case. The effect of this is that new creoles and pidgins are continually being added to the lists of such languages.

Recognition has come quickest for those creoles and pidgins (partially) based on Euro-

pean colonial languages, although even here we may be certain that some languages remain undiscovered. In the case of creoles and pidgins not involving a European base linguists have been faced with the above-mentioned problem that the history of very many languages is very poorly known. And as we will discover time and time again in the course of this book, a knowledge of the history of a language is often essential for determining its creole or pidgin status, or the lack of this. This means that creoles that came into existence hundreds of years ago may only be recognized as such in modern times.

The small size of many creole-speaking communities also militates against their recognition. A small linguistic community will more easily be assumed to represent a (deviant) dialect of a larger language than a large one will. Small communities also get overlooked more easily. So the Wutun 'dialect' of Qinghai province, China has been recognized as involving a problem in classification by Chinese scholars for quite some time. This mixed Amdo Tibetan-Kansu Mongol-Chinese language has certainly been in existence for several hundred years. It had been variously claimed to be Chinese, Monguor and Tibetan. Its essentially mixed status was first recognized by Chen (1982). The fact, however, that the language has only 2500 speakers in five villages has not helped it to appear in any list or classification of the world's languages. For instance, it does not appear in the 11th edition of *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1988).

We have cited the question of prejudice above. This is especially relevant in the case of pidgins. Pidgins, by their very nature, tend towards instability, both in terms of linguistic system, and in terms of their function. If they do not belong to the small group of pidgins that become standardized, or nativized, or both, they may well disappear completely when the social need that caused them to come into existence passes. An event so trivial as the disruption of a market may make a particular pidgin redundant. Population movements may have the same effect. So the *raison d'être* of the Pidgin Russian spoken in Harbin, Manchuria, between Russians and Chinese, disappeared when most of the Russians left in the fifties.

1.4 History of pidgin and creole studies

Why should there be a field of pidgin and creole language studies? Since the group of languages as a whole are not genetically related, nor spoken in the same area, the languages must be considered to have something else in common, in order to be meaningfully studied as a group. In the field there is an implicit assumption that the creole languages share some property that calls for an explanatory theory.

The earliest written sources for many creoles date from the 18th century, when missionaries started writing dictionaries, and translating religious texts into the languages of the slaves.

The first time the term 'creole' was applied to a language was 1739, in the Virgin Islands, when the very youthful Dutch-lexifier creole Negerhollands was referred to as *carriolsche* by a Moravian missionary (Stein 1987). The first grammar of a creole was written in the Virgin Islands by J.M. Mogens, a scion of a local planter family (1770). In addition to missionaries, travellers or other laymen occasionally wrote brief dialogues etc. in the local creoles, at that time generally referred to as Negro-English, Negro-Dutch, etc. There are reasonable historical records for a number of creole languages, including Negerhollands, Sranan and Saramaccan (Surinam), Mauritian Creole, and Jamaican. These allow us to study the historical development of the creole languages (see chapter 10).

Creole studies originated as a systematic field of research over a century ago, with Schuchardt's (1842-1927) important series of articles. These started as an attempt to account for a more complex set of developments in the history of the Romance languages than was possible in the Neogrammarian preoccupation with the regularity of sound change. Hesselink's (1880-1941) work originally started out from an explanation of the developments in Greek, from the early dialects through koine Greek under the Roman Empire, to Byzantine and modern Greek. Both scholars found it necessary to allow for more complex types of linguistic change: mixture, simplification, reanalysis, and the complexity of their analyses characterizes modern creole studies as well.

Until 1965 the field remained, however, rather marginal. Creole languages were studied by a few enthusiastic historical linguists – usually Anglicists or Romanists, fieldworkers with an adventurous bent, or folklorists ahead of their time. Now the study of creole languages has moved to the center of linguistic research, a research program with universalist theoretical pretensions, half-way between theoretical linguistics and sociolinguistics. Reasons for this development are manifold, but include the political and cultural emancipation of certain parts of the Caribbean (most notably Jamaica), an interest in Afro-American culture, particularly in the U.S., and a partial reorientation of linguistic research.

1.5 Theories of origin in creole studies and theoretical linguistics

The main research effort in pidgin and creole studies has been to find a principled explanation for the genesis of the languages involved. There is an implicit assumption that the creole languages share some property that calls for an explanatory theory. What property this is depends on the theory concerned. Any of four properties are assumed to play a role:

→ (1) Creole languages are often assumed to be more **alike** than other languages. As we will see, creoles share many structural features, and many researchers believe that these resemblances cannot be simply due to the similarity between the languages of western Europe, or accidental.

→ (2) Creole languages are often assumed to be more **simple** than other languages. There is a wide-spread belief that creole languages are not just morphologically, but also syntactically and phonologically simpler than other languages.

→ (3) Creole languages are often assumed to have more **mixed** grammars than other languages. Many people have drawn parallels between language and biology, when thinking of creoles. It is assumed that just as many speakers of creole languages have 'mixed' African, European, Asian and in some cases Amerindian ancestry, the languages they speak are likewise simply a combination of a bit of European vocabulary with some African or Asian syntax and semantics.

→ (4) Pidgin and creole languages are often assumed to exhibit much more **internal variability** than other languages. They are assumed to be highly dynamic language systems and often coexist with their lexifier languages in the same speech community.

These assumptions play a role in the various theories of creole origin that have been proposed. The theories of origin have been developed in part to explain the assumed similarity, simplicity, mixing, and variability of the creole languages. We have chosen to group these theories into four categories, in chapters 8-11. Here we will briefly summarize the principal hypotheses put forward. References will be provided in the relevant chapters.

1.5.1 The European input

Some models attempt to trace the properties of the pidgins and creoles back to specific antecedents in Europe (see further chapter 8). The **Portuguese mono(-)genesis** model has undergone several modifications. Crucial to all of these is the existence of a trade language with a predominantly Portuguese lexicon, used in the 15th to 18th centuries by traders, slave raiders, and merchants from throughout the then incipient colonial societies. The monogenetic theory holds that the slaves learned the Portuguese Pidgin in the slave camps, trading forts, and slave ships of their early captivity, and then took this language, really no more than a jargon, with them to the plantations. The different creole languages as we know them are based on this jargon, but have replaced the Portuguese words with words from other European languages. The supposed similarity of the creole languages is due of course to the underlying Portuguese jargon, and their simplicity to the simplicity of this jargon.

The **restricted monogenesis** hypothesis is less ambitious. It is mostly limited to the English and French-lexifier creole languages of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, and proceeds from the idea that there was a jargon or pidgin spoken along the coast of West Africa that later formed the primary source for a wide range of creoles. The common features of these creoles are then assumed to be due to these early pidgins.

The **European dialect origin** hypothesis holds that creoles essentially developed from non-standard dialects of the colonial languages in an ordinary way, and are the result of

migration by dialect speakers to the newly founded colonies, compounded with the existence of a strongly dialectal nautical language. In this theory, similarities between creoles hold only for those derived from a single colonial language; creoles may be simple because the non-standard varieties were simpler than the written national standard.

In other approaches, processes involving the transformation of the European languages play a central role, through imperfect second language learning or the reduction of speech directed at foreigners. The **baby talk** or **foreigner talk** theory is similar to the imperfect second language learning theory in postulating that creoles are frozen (i.e. fossilized) stages in the second language learning sequence. The difference lies in the fact that in the baby talk theory the responsibility for the simplification is shifted from the learners to the speakers of European languages, who provide a simplified model. The similarity between creoles would be due, in this view, to universal properties of the simplified input. The type of evidence adherents of the baby talk hypothesis are looking for thus includes simplifications made by native speakers, not by learners, in pidgins, such as the use of infinitives.

In the **imperfect second language learning** theory creoles are the crystallization of some stage in the developmental sequence of second language acquisition. The speakers of the proto-creole simply did not have sufficient access to the model, and had to make up an approximative system. In this view the fact that creoles are simple is due to the simplification inherent in the second language learning process. For some adherents of this view the possible similarities among the creole languages are due to universal properties of the learning process.

1.5.2 The Non-European input

The **Afro-genesis** model really deals mostly with the creole languages spoken in the Atlantic region: West Africa and the Caribbean, and postulates that these languages have emerged through the relexification by the slaves of the West African languages, the so-called **substrate** languages, under influence of the European colonial languages (see chapter 9). An alternative explanation is in terms of the transfer of African language structures in the process of learning the colonial lexifier languages. The similarity of the languages involved is due, in this model, to the fact that they share the same African linguistic features, mixed together with the lexicon of the European languages. The main problems with the Afro-genesis model in its strict version are the large number of structural differences between West African languages and creoles on the one hand, and the linguistic differences among the various West African languages themselves on the other. What has been claimed to save the hypothesis is that in the process of relexification certain syntactic and semantic properties of European lexical items were incorporated as well.

1.5.3 Developmental approaches

Many researchers study pidgins and creoles from a developmental perspective, as **gradually** evolving and continuously changing systems rather than as stable systems that emerged rapidly. Within this approach, expansion of pidgins through their continued use and growth in functional domain is stressed above strictly grammatical or cognitive aspects. In chapter 11 we return to various developmental approaches.

The **common social context** theory adopts a such strictly functional perspective: the slave plantations imposed similar communicative requirements on the slaves, newly arrived, and lacking a common language in many cases. The commonality of the communicative requirements led to the formation of a series of fairly similar makeshift communicative systems, which then stabilized and became creoles.

1.5.4 Universalist approaches

Universalist models stress the intervention of a specific general process during the transmission of language from generation to generation and from speaker to speaker (see chapter 11). The process invoked varies: a general tendency towards semantic transparency, first language learning driven by universal processes, or general processes of discourse organization.

The **semantic transparency** theory is not a full-blown genesis theory, but simply claims that the structure of creole languages directly reflects universal semantic structures. The fact that they are alike, in this view, is due to the fact that the semantic structures are universal. They are simple because the semantic structures involved are fairly directly mapped onto surface structures, eschewing any very complex transformational derivation. An example of this may be the fact that creole languages have separate tense/mood/aspect particles, which reflect separate logical operators, rather than incorporating tense, etc. into the inflection of the verb.

The **bioprogram** theory claims that creoles are inventions of the children growing up on the newly founded plantations. Around them they only heard pidgins spoken, without enough structure to function as natural languages, and they used their own innate linguistic capacities to transform the pidgin input from their parents into a full-fledged language. Creole languages are similar because the innate linguistic capacity utilized is universal, and they are simple because they reflect the most basic language structures. One feature shared by all creoles that would derive from the innate capacity is the system of pre-verbal tense/mood/aspect particles. Not only do they seem limited in the creole languages to a particular set of meanings, but they also seem always to occur in a particular order. The system of tense/mood/aspect particles, its interpretation and its ordering would directly reflect universal aspects of the human language capacity.

1.5.5 Theoretical implications

In all these models or theories notions such as **alike**, **simple**, **mixed**, and **variable** play a role. They are in fact taken for granted, assumed to be what requires to be explained, and therefore not called into question. The contribution that the study of creole languages can make, in our view, to grammatical theory is that it can help to elucidate these four concepts 'alike', 'simple', 'mixed', and 'variable'. All four turn out to be relevant to the central concerns of modern grammatical theory. In order to help us understand this, let us examine the concepts involved more closely.

When we say that languages x and y are more alike than y and z , we are claiming in fact that in the total (abstract) **variation space** allowed for by the human language capacity x and y are closer than y and z . Consequently, the claim that the creole languages are more alike than other languages implies a clustering in the variation space. If we think of the variation space as defined by **parameter theory** (as in recent work by Chomsky and others), trying to develop a notion of 'alike' really boils down to developing a theory of parameters, parameters along which similarities and differences between natural languages can be defined.

Consider now the concept of simplicity. The idea that creole languages are simple has been taken to mean two things. On one level it has meant that creole languages do not have a rich morphology, on another that the overall grammar of creole languages is less complex than that of other languages. Both interpretations are relevant to grammatical theory. The idea that **absence of morphology** is related to grammatical simplicity needs to be evaluated in the context of contemporary research into morphology/syntax interactions, and the grammatical status of **inflection** or **INFL** (Chomsky 1982; Rizzi 1982, and others) and of case marking (Stowell, 1981). Even more importantly, the idea that the creole languages are not grammatically complex in general only makes sense if one has a theory of grammatical complexity to fall back on, and this brings in **markedness theory**.

Consider next the notion of mixing. Mixing implies that elements from one language are combined with elements from another, and this in turn calls into question the cohesion of the grammatical systems involved. The tighter a particular subsystem (e.g. the vowel system, or the system of referential expressions) is organized, the less amenable it will be to restructuring under borrowing. Tightness of organization in modern grammatical theory is conceptualized in terms of **modularity theory**: the grammar is organized into a set of internally structured but externally independent modules, the interaction of which leads to the final grammatical output. For this reason, the notion of mixing is important: it forces us to think about which parts of the grammar are tightly organized, and hence about the notion of modularity.

Tightness of organization or cohesion may have either a paradigmatic dimension, in

terms of the hierarchical organization of **feature systems**, or a syntagmatic dimension, in terms perhaps of the notion of **government** (Chomsky 1981) as a central principle of syntactic organization.

An important group of creole researchers has focused on the dynamic and variable aspects of language (Sankoff 1982; Bickerton 1975; Rickford 1987). While linguists working in terms of the paradigm of generative grammar tend to abstract away from variation and change, focusing on the universal and invariable aspects of linguistic competence, many creolists have tended to put **variation and change** at the center of attention: only by studying the changes that languages undergo and the ways in which these changes are manifested in the speech community can we find out about the phenomenon of language. Pidgin and creole languages form a natural field of study for these researchers, precisely because they present so much internal variation and because they tend to change so rapidly. The extent of variation present (and this is particularly relevant for pidgins) again raises the questions mentioned above with respect to the internal cohesion of a grammatical system and how parameters determine the way languages vary.

Keeping this in mind, then, the contribution of pidgin and creole studies to linguistic theory is clear. We have come to grips with one or more of the core notions of grammatical theory:

alike:	parameter theory
simple:	morphology/syntax interactions markedness theory
mixed:	modularity
variable:	parameter theory, modularity

Studying creole languages implies a constant confrontation with these notions, and helps one to develop a vocabulary capable of dealing with them.

Further reading

The primary source for documentation on the different pidgins and creoles is still Reinecke's monumental bibliography (1975). There are a number of introductions to pidgin and creole studies on the market, including Hall (1966), Todd (1974; 1990), Mühlhäusler (1986), with much information about the Pacific, Holm (1988), strong on the history of the field, and Romaine (1988), strong on links with psycholinguistic research. In French we have Valdman (1978). In addition there is a large number of collections of articles, of which Hymes (1971), Valdman (1977), and Valdman and Highfield (1981) are the most general in scope.

Useful monographs by single authors are: Bickerton (1981), which contains a highly

readable exposition of the bioprogram hypothesis; Alleyne (1981), which documents the Afro-genesis hypothesis with a wealth of detail; and Sankoff (1980), which presents the view that the structure of creole languages is finely attuned to their functional requirements with a number of insightful articles. There are two specialized journals, *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* and *Études Créoles*. In addition there is a newsletter, *The Carrier Pidgin*.